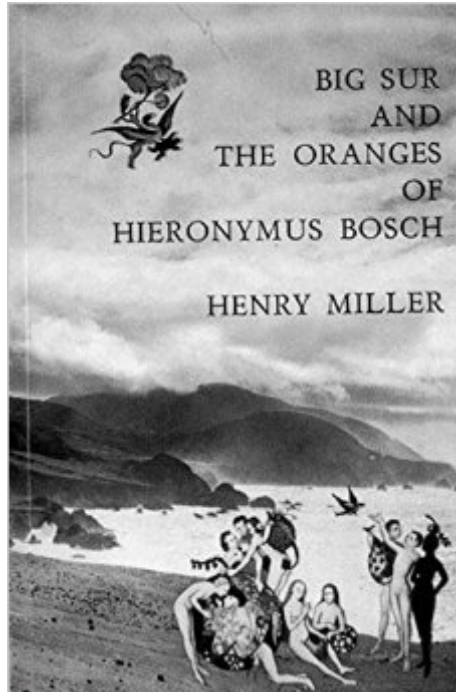


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Big Sur And The Oranges Of Hieronymus Bosch



Synopsis

In his great triptych "The Millennium," Bosch used oranges and other fruits to symbolize the delights of Paradise. Whence Henry Miller's title for this, one of his most appealing books; first published in 1957, it tells the story of Miller's life on the Big Sur, a section of California coast where he lived for fifteen years. Big Sur is the portrait of a place — one of the most colorful in the U.S. — and of the extraordinary people Miller knew there: writers (& writers who didn't write), mystics seeking truth in meditation (& the not-so-saintly looking for sex-cults or celebrity), sophisticated children & adult innocents; geniuses, cranks & the unclassifiable. Henry Miller writes with a buoyancy & brimming energy that are infectious. He has a fine touch for comedy. But this is also a serious book — the testament of a free spirit who has broken through the restraints & cliches of modern life to find within himself his own kind of paradise.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I first read this book exactly ten years ago when I was struggling through a profound period of depression. I don't want to say that the book cured me, because that would be too facile and too drastic a declaration, but I will say that Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch was the first real beacon, the first glimmer of light to lead me out of a suffocating psychological cave. I don't know why, exactly, but when I began reading the book, a deep sense of peace came over me for the first time in several months. The book seemed to open up my eyes and my ears and my throat and even my lungs; I found myself sucking in big sweet gulps of air, and I started to detect a

freedom and a limitlessness in the world that I had previously failed to recognize. Of course, there is no way that I can promise that you will have the same reaction. Over the years I have passed the book along to various friends: Some of them have fallen in love with it and some of them have been utterly bored. That is understandable. The book has no plot; in fact, it doesn't really pretend to have any forward momentum. The narrative just floats. As other reviewers have noted (both enthusiastically and bitterly), Henry Miller delivers in this book a seemingly random swirl of philosophy, wit, character studies, soaring observations of topography and weather, literary and arty musings, puzzles, koans, epigrams, aphorisms, scripture, historical trivia, astrological forecasts, and jokes. It does not, upon first glance, have any point whatsoever. But that, friend, is the point.

In the 1940's and '50's, long before the New Age gurus and their guides to better living, author Henry Miller was letting his soul run free and writing about it high above the Pacific Ocean in remote Big Sur, California. This book is his account of that experience after his return from Europe and subsequent car tour of America. It is a refreshing, joyous, insightful, touching, humorous and often profound book that challenges our acceptance of today's hectic world while also being essential reading for those who have read the two Tropics and would like a better understanding of the man behind these books, two of the greatest and most controversial of all time. "This is my answer!" states Miller in the book's opening pages, and in this regard Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch is his Walden. Because it was here, in the far West, far removed from his native New York, that Miller found the only home he could abide by in America, a place where he felt he could live peaceably as a creative artist apart from a way of life he saw as thin and meaningless and which he had long since turned his back on. It was not easy living. The convict shack where Miller initially stayed, a thousand feet above the crashing waves, had neither electricity nor plumbing. There was also the intense isolation. At that time, Big Sur was strictly for the adventurous, a small colony of artists and individuals seeking to live and raise families freely, simply, and close to nature. Highway One had yet to bring the tourists. But despite these difficulties, and probably because of them, Miller came to see Big Sur as the first real home he had ever known.

My first glimpse into the world of Henry Miller has brought me a new highly admired author to read. Though 'Big Sur' is reputed to be one of his more 'tame works'...Tropic of Cancer and Tropic of Capricorn having been banned works for years due to their highly sexual content, the mind of Miller is indeed a wondrous place to explore. I came across this title while searching online for info about Kerouac's novel 'Big Sur', and decided to indulge in this one as well. And a happy treat awaited

me. Having only recently begun to enjoy 'biography as fiction' works, it takes a rare author to put one at peace with their words, when they are simply a recounting of their own life and adventures. Miller wrote 'Big Sur' not so much as a 'novel', since there is not a conventional thread to follow, other than the location and himself as protagonist, but more as a memoir of the 15 years spent in this California 'paradise' of artists, bohemians, and eclectic characters. Through describing his tranquil, ambling days spent walking back and forth with supplies from town, meeting the thrice-per-week mail delivery, or simply writing, the reader gets to experience the serenity that Miller enjoyed throughout most of his time there. Being a Virgo I look for structure, order, sense, etc., in most things, especially literature. Little of that is to be found here, really, but Miller's style is so captivating that you can't help but read on. His serenity at Big Sur easily becomes your own. But be warned, that serenity is interrupted by the arrival of an overseas acquaintance, Conrad Moricand, who turns Miller's idyllic home upside down during his stay there.

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